

# Manufacturing improvements

How Kinetico fine tunes its internal relationships **By Daniel G. Jacobs**

**K**inetico treats its employees well, but Vince Slusarz says there is always room for improvement.

“We’ve been a healthy company since our founding,” says Slusarz, vice president of manufacturing for Kinetico Inc. “Like any company, you can always improve, but we didn’t have a burning bridge type of situation here where there was a crisis and we needed to do rapid change.”

Encouraged by Fulcrum Consulting Works President Rebecca Morgan, Kinetico’s management has embraced a philosophy of continuous improvement. One area the company has worked to improve is the shift change.

“Rebecca has been very instrumental in encouraging us to adopt simpler solutions, simpler communication solutions - visual aides that tell people where we’re at, the status of production,” Slusarz says. “You go to virtually any department and see what is going on that day, what issues there are. We take what we’ve learned and stand on it ourselves.”

It is also important, Slusarz says, to know where you want to end up.

“If you’re trying to improve a process, you need to define what success looks like,” Slusarz says. “If you don’t do that, how do you know whether you’ve improved it or not? You have to keep examining it.”

It all begins with communication. Not all companies have the strong relationship Kinetico’s management has with its production team, and those with poor communication skills between the office and the production floor are destined for trouble.

“Manufacturing companies are facing global competition,” Morgan says. “Every manufacturing company, unless they’ve got one heck of a niche market and a proprietary product with which nobody can compete — and I don’t know anybody that fits that description — needs to deal with, ‘How are we going to get every employee working to make us better?’”

The office and the production floor may have the same goal but differ on how to get there.

“It’s not unusual for there to be different understanding of what we’re doing or how we try to do it,” Morgan says. “It’s not unusual for production workers on the floor to feel left out of some key things going on in the office.”

While communication has always been good at Kinetico, Slusarz wanted to make it better.



**Kinetico’s Vince Slusarz**

*“If you’re trying to improve a process, you need to define what success looks like. If you don’t do that, how do you know whether you’ve improved it or not?”*

“Now, the supervisors are doing a walk-around, and there is a bit of an overlap in our molding department,” Slusarz says. “With the new shift coming on, they’ll go to each press, and each operator will talk about how their press is running, how this part is running.”

Another part of improving that communication is keeping doors open. Closed doors are a sign of poor communication and send the wrong message to employees, Morgan says.

“Some people pay attention to body language,” she says. “I pay attention to flow within an operation. When I see doors shut, I see that as a potential interruption to flow — of information, of respect. I need to look at that and see if there is a legitimate reason that door is closed all the time.”

If it’s a lack of trust that keeps the doors closed, Morgan says the company is in trouble.

“They’ll likely go out of business,” she says. “When there are only five or 10 people, whether it’s management or office workers or whatever who are trying to make thing better and the rest of the people are challenging and questioning every single move, it’s just not going to work long term.”

**HOW TO REACH:** Kinetico Inc., [www.kinetico.com](http://www.kinetico.com)

## Eight rules for management

Rebecca A. Morgan, president of Fulcrum ConsultingWorks, has been observing manufacturing operations for more than 15 years and has come up with eight rules for manufacturers, which can also apply to any company.

1. Obliterate false divisions. Unlock the doors between the production areas and the front office, and keep them open.

2. Create seamless shift changes. Create a checklist of important information that all shifts need to know as part of the shift-to-shift handoff.

3. Keep a clean house. An unkempt factory sends a message about the work environment to employees: that management doesn’t care about the customers or the product.

4. Listen to all employees. Management must acknowledge employee requests and communicate back to them with status reports.

5. Recognize individuals. Each of us has a basic need to feel like we belong and to believe we are valued.

6. Find the frustrating fixables. Find the one or two things that frustrate your employees the most and fix them.

7. Define success. Having metrics to measure performance will be lost if employees don’t understand how they relate to them.

8. Require a written summary for changes. Bring a disciplined thought process for change by requiring that proposed changes be outlined in writing by defining the goal, how it will be implemented and criteria to evaluate success.

**HOW TO REACH:** Fulcrum ConsultingWorks: (216) 486-9570